

**ENS Maggie Clark
JRCOSTEP Summer 2022
Western Carolina University
Great Plains Area Office
Aberdeen, South Dakota**

My name is Margaret (Maggie) Clark, and I am a rising senior at Western Carolina University and will be graduating May 2023 with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health. Following graduation, I plan to pursue a graduate degree in public health. This summer I had the amazing opportunity to serve with the U.S. Public Health Service as a part of their Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program. I received my assignment for the Indian Health Service (IHS), Great Plains Area, Division of Environmental Health Services in Aberdeen, SD. The Great Plains Area (GPA) serves tribes located in Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Nebraska.

Before applying to the JRCOSTEP, I learned about this through a social worker that was assigned to Butner Prison. Since that encounter it had been a dream for me to be a part of the Commissioned Corps in any way possible in order to serve those who are in need of assistance. Luckily, after applying I received my assignment in Aberdeen, SD. Ecstatic, I said yes to this opportunity, and was guided by Timothy Wildcat throughout the rest of my process before beginning my trip to South Dakota. I am very thankful to have had Tim and CDR Jamison Honeycutt to guide me throughout the summer and help me expand my knowledge as a junior environmental health specialist and on the IHS mission so that I could best serve tribal communities.

During my time in South Dakota, I was able to travel all around the Great Plains Area, mostly conducting food service sanitation surveys. In Minot, ND I was able to work with LT Haddeland to survey food establishments and learn about the tribe in Turtle Mountain. On the border of Nebraska, CDR Honeycutt and I were able to do a healthy home survey and assess a mice problem the homeowners were having.

For my summer project, I was tasked with creating a data set that would be used by a GPA workgroup to develop a guidance document for powwow committees. I conducted data mining from past Powwow survey forms for critical violations and conducted key informant interviews with GPA DEHS staff. The key informant interviews consisted of five to seven questions developed to determine key items that field staff and powwow committees face during the planning and commencement of a powwow. The importance of this was to determine how to increase better food safety during these celebrations.

Lastly, I was able to work with Timothy Wildcat to complete a GPA seatbelt survey. This consisted of assessing seatbelt usage in the GPA and comparing it to the national, and state averages. The overall goal was to give recommendations on how to improve seatbelt usage and make an infographic to publicly share my findings.

Overall, this experience is something I will never forget. From the job itself to the people I met outside of my externship. I am forever a changed woman. Everyone should do a JRCOSTEP. It is truly such a unique and rewarding opportunity. To Timothy Wildcat, Veronica Leaf-Bellile,

Terrold Menzie, CDR Honeycutt, and LT Haddeland – thank you. Thank you for pushing me to my extremes and seeing my potential. I truly have never felt more accepted and believed in more than when I was there. It is true when they say, “It’s not just about the grades, but the person as a whole”. I will be forever grateful for the personal growth I have endured this summer. Thank you, Western Carolina University Environmental Health Program for preparing me so well for this opportunity of a lifetime.