

**ENS Billy Porter
Jr. COSTEP Summer 2009
East Central University
Santa Fe Service Unit
Santa Fe, New Mexico**

My name is Billy Porter, and I was born and raised in Oklahoma. My father told me about the COSTEP and the Commissioned Corps, and I gained more information about it from my college professor, CAPT (Ret.) Patrick Bohan.

The most challenging part of the COSTEP process, for me, was the amount of paperwork. Sorting through all the paperwork with my parents I eventually gathered the necessary materials. Unfortunately, the packet was apparently lost in transit, twice. It was somewhat embarrassing asking my personal references to complete a reference form two more times, but I explained to them the situation and they were happy to help me out. I would recommend making copies of everything you submit and asking your references to make copies also.

After a few weeks of waiting, unsure if my late COSTEP application would be accepted, I received a call from LT Katie Noonan Hubbard and CDR Jeff Dickson offering me the position to intern for the summer at the Santa Fe Service Unit in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and I immediately agreed. With the help of my supervisor for the summer, Katie Noonan Hubbard, I quickly found a place to stay in Santa Fe, rooming with another environmental health COSTEP, Mike Carey. I arrived at my duty station ready to begin an exciting summer.

I thought my first day in the Indian Health Services would be a slow process of filling out paperwork and easing my way into the kind of work that is done. My supervisors had other plans, however. Shortly after arriving at the office, Katie, Anthony Candelaria, an Environmental Health Technician, and I were off to the Pueblo of Santa Clara to perform a common community activity: a rabies vaccination clinic. Rabies is a disease of concern on the pueblos so rabies vaccination clinics are performed in the service communities to prevent the spread of the rabies virus. After Katie and Anthony demonstrated how to perform injections on a few dogs and cats and explained the process to me, it was my turn to vaccinate. I dove head first into my COSTEP experience, and it didn't slow down one bit!



Vaccinating a chihuahua during a rabies clinic

Performing rabies vaccination clinics was only one of the responsibilities I was given for the summer. I also performed environmental health surveys of food service facilities (restaurants, cafes, school cafeterias, etc), inspected food booths at each of the pueblos' annual celebrations,

participated in a sanitary survey of a community's water, sewer, and solid waste systems, and taught a food handler's training. When I wasn't working in the field, I was in the office entering data gathered from the field into the Web-Based Environmental Health Reporting System, or WebEHRS. I also compiled information for a Community Environmental Health Profile for the Pueblo of San Felipe, which required me to meet and interview several members of the community.

Gaining experience and observing the services performed by Environmental Health Officers came with the benefit of experiencing each of the pueblos' wonderful annual celebrations, the Feast Days, where the people of the pueblo honor their patron saint. On this day, traditional dances are performed and families and friends gather to feast together. This event was easily the highlight of my summer.

I'm glad my father hounded me to apply for the JRCOSTEP, and that CAPT (Ret.) Patrick Bohan helped me gain information on the opportunity. I'm happy I was able to meet new people



and hopefully make a positive impact on the service communities, and I thank the staff at the Santa Fe Service Unit for watching over me and giving me this wonderful experience.

To those thinking about applying for the COSTEP experience, but feel that it may be too much weight on their shoulders, I say brace your feet.

You won't regret it.