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My journey with the Junior COSTEP program started with an epidemiology class I took at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Bowling Green, Ohio. LT Danielle Mills, A graduate of BGSU, spoke to our class about the United States Public Health Service (PHS). Right then and there I discovered how I wanted to spend my career: bettering the lives of others through PHS. The PHS Mission became my mission and the PHS Core Values became my values. Since the beginning of my college experience, I have been seeking a career where I could use my compassionate nature to make a positive difference and I knew, the minute I heard about it, that the PHS could be the place for me.



Once the application and interview process was complete I was on my way to making my dreams come true and my first stop was Bremerton, Washington. I was placed, for a three-month assignment, at the Indian Health Service's (IHS) Olympic District Office of Environmental Health and Engineering. There I met my preceptor CDR Karin Knopp the District Environmental Health Officer for the Portland Area. Karin has more than 15 years with the Public Health Service and through her careful guidance I was able to learn the importance and unique nature of helping the Native American population.

During my tenure in the Bremerton office, my main duties were to inspect food venues, pools, and daycare sites on the many Indian reservations in Western Washington. I also wrote reports, established survey guides, made food code fact sheets, and researched other codes that may be applicable to Indian reservations.



As an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) for IHS I was able to work, hands-on, with several Washington tribes. Interestingly enough, my first and last visit was to the Tulalip Tribes Indian Reservation performing food surveys. For my first venture I was unsure what to expect--let alone do—but for the last visit I was able to perform a entire inspection by myself.

Additionally, I was also able to inspect several other tribal food and beverage venues. The Muckleshoot and Snoqualmie Casinos were of a magnitude that I have never seen. The facilities

were so large that it took us two days to simply perform the initial surveys. Snoqualmie Casino illustrated, to me, the importance of economic growth on a Tribe and its' members. On the Suquamish Reservation, during a celebratory reenactment of a Tribal Canoe Journey which happened 20 years previously, I was able to inspect the mobile food venues. Never has work been so worthwhile. Furthermore, I felt I was able to positively impact the Tribes while gaining new experiences.

Also, as an EHO I learned the importance of upholding the Mission and Core Values of a program that is committed to protecting the inherent sovereign rights of Tribes, Nations, and their members. I am proud to have been a part of a unique Indian health and safety system.

If there are others who are considering the COSTEP program that might like to chat with me directly about the challenges and benefits of this experience, you may reach me at nikkiENVH4life “at” yahoo “dot” com.