

Jessica Dawn Phillips
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Western Carolina University
Reno District Office
Phoenix Area Indian Health Service

My name is Jessica Dawn Phillips, and I am a rising senior at Western Carolina University where I am majoring in Environmental Health. I first heard of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) through one of my most influential professors. After having an Environmental Health-wide luncheon with a USPHS representative and asking him many questions, I decided that the JrCOSTEP experience would be the perfect internship for me. I knew that I wanted to travel and have plenty of hands on experience in the field, so I couldn't have asked for a more ideal internship. I was offered a position as a JrCOSTEP and assigned to the Indian Health Service (IHS) at the Reno District Office of Environmental Health and Engineering in Sparks, Nevada working under the direction of LTJG Molly Madson. I was very fortunate to be assigned to a preceptor and office that encouraged my exposure to many learning experiences in every aspect possible. I had the opportunity to learn a lot about the culture of the tribes in the Schurz and Owens Valley Service Units, located all over northwestern Nevada and eastern California. This internship drew me in for a number of reasons, primarily because of my desire to pursue a career within the USPHS, and the general experience of moving across the country.



From my very first day in the office, I was able to apply the knowledge that I had gained during my first three years of college. I was able to assist with numerous surveys including Summer Food Service Programs, Elder Nutrition Programs, Day Care facilities, and convenience stores. I also had the opportunity to survey a Taco Bell, as well as survey a health center and wellness center. I assisted with multiple Food Handler Trainings, and helped lead a hand washing activity for the youth of the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. I also had the opportunity to assist with a mold investigation for a home on one of the reservations, and provided recommendations to make their home healthier.



Injury Prevention is another aspect of Public Health that is included in the Indian Health Service division of Environmental Health services. I had no experience with Injury Prevention prior to coming to Reno, and am glad to say that I have learned so much about it in my ten weeks here. I was able to help conduct covert operation stake outs to observe seat belt usage at various intersections on Tribal land. My preceptor and I then entered in the data, where the statistics will be maintained along with the data from previous years to assist Injury Prevention specialists to better promote seat belt usage.

My absolute favorite part of my internship was when I had the opportunity to travel to Owens Valley, California overnight to assist in Rabies Vaccination Clinics with a USDA veterinarian, the vet tech, and my preceptor. It was awesome to know that we were making a difference by offering the rabies vaccinations free of charge and promoting public health. I'm thankful that I had the opportunity to develop a friendship with the veterinarian, who later let me ride her wild donkey in a parade!

My supervisor, LTJG Molly Madson, did a great job of helping me acclimate and feel welcome in the office. She kept me very busy and ensured that everything I experienced was used as an opportunity to learn. I spent a great deal of time out in the field, and when I was in the office, I was always busy with various assignments. I wrote numerous survey reports, worked on revisions to the Safety Resource Manual, and was the editor of the Reno District Newsletter. I also worked on an acquisitions document for the contracting officer, which will be distributed to the Phoenix Area IHS organization and its 10 subordinate hospitals and clinics. The best aspect of my internship was that there was never a dull moment.

One of the biggest impacts this internship had on me was the life experiences. I discovered so much about myself in the ten weeks that I spent in Reno. I have always been independent, however this was the first time that I had ever uprooted as far as 2,600 miles and lived in a strange city completely alone. It would be impossible for me to accurately express how much I've grown and gained from this experience. I found the work fascinating and the experience in general to be empowering. I feel as though this internship has truly given me the tools I need to continue on as an Environmental Health Professional.



Overall, this has been one of the most positive and enlightening life changing experiences I have ever had. I plan on applying for a second COSTEP experience next summer, and am strongly considering Alaska as my duty station. I am so grateful for my time in Reno and look forward to possibly seeing what the USPHS Commissioned Corps has to offer after graduation. This has been an incredible experience, and I recommend this internship to anyone.