

TRAINEE SPOTLIGHT

Charles Udeze

(Pronouns: He/Him)



LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTION HOST SITE
San Joaquin County



EDUCATION
UC Merced
BS Public Health



HOMETOWN
Born in Nigeria
Raised in Stockton, CA

WHY JOIN THE CA PUBLIC HEALTH CORPS (CA-PHC)?

Growing up in a small suburb located in the southern half of the city, I became aware of the disparity in resources that my community experienced compared to the residents in the northern half. Most of the city's grocery stores, green spaces, and health clinics are in North Stockton. Accessing them from South Stockton means that you need access to reliable transportation, childcare, and extra time to travel to those places – all resources that many of my neighbors do not have. This is fundamentally unfair.

My interest in the Pathways Program stems from my desire to engage with the epidemiology of communicable diseases, like COVID-19, in greater detail. I was fortunate enough to be accepted into the program and placed at San Joaquin County Public Health Services, working in my hometown.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING ON?

The majority of my time has been spent working as a Communicable Disease Investigator in the Disease Control & Prevention Unit, performing case investigation and contact tracing (CI/CT) for a variety of diseases. So far, I've been able to investigate over 200 COVID-19 cases and assist them wherever I could.

In addition to CI/CT, I've led the development of a virtual healthy recipe contest with the Health Promotion Unit. The contest, called the Junior Chef's Challenge, will be an opportunity for South Stockton youth to show off their cooking skills in a fun, healthy, and cost-effective way. We are in the final stages of program development and expect to launch the contest in early-Spring 2022.

I've also been able to engage my community. I trained to become a focus group facilitator and gather data for the county's biennial health needs assessment. I am also a part of the Resilient Community Advisory Committee, where I meet with local CBOs and agencies to explore more effective ways to reach out to our higher-risk communities with critical COVID-19 public health messages.

The highlight of my time so far was being introduced to San Joaquin's Public Health Officer, Dr. Maggie Park. During our meeting, Dr. Park told me about the major challenges and accomplishments she's faced in her role and her thoughts about the future of COVID-19 and San Joaquin County. I was also able to share my goals as a Trainee with her and my professional pursuits. Delighted, she imparted wisdom onto me and offered words of encouragement. Speaking with Dr. Park emboldens me to continue making changes to ensure that every person can live their best quality of life.

WHAT COMES AFTER CA-PHC?

After witnessing the policy, socioeconomic, and clinical manifestations of systemic inequity in Stockton and the Central Valley, I remain motivated to improve the health and well-being of its residents. Following my time as a CA-PHC Trainee, I plan to obtain an MPH and medical degree, with the intention of staying in the Central Valley and becoming a public health officer. I will continue to collaborate with residents and community organizations to build fairer, more accessible institutions for all.