



May 2009

Randstad volunteer Susann in Zambia

Susann Stritzke, commercial consultant with Randstad Germany, has been working in Zambia since the end of March 2009 to help launch the Randstad HR-Solutions project. Within the project she works with various organizations in the capital Lusaka as well as in the city of Choma. Susann faces the challenge of implementing HR-policies and procedures in very different organizations.

"I arrived one month ago and it's been a busy and exciting time so far. After the orientation and introduction week organized by VSO in Lusaka, I started working. My first station is Choma where I work with two partner organizations: Youth Development Organization (YDO) and Choma Municipal Council. YDO educates and empowers young people so they can participate in politics and education, run their own business and help fight HIV/AIDS. YDO also supports the Self-Help-Group project, funded by German organization Kindernothilfe, which helps empower poor women in becoming small business owners. The women are encouraged to set up groups in their communities, sell goods they produce and receive and give loans to other community members.

In the last few weeks I've visited workshops and I've started to set up an HR-manual that contains service conditions, behavioral guidelines and job descriptions for management staff and volunteers. The first step was to assess the needs and HR-issues and to agree on common solutions with the YDO team. I can say we are well on our way! The next step will be to raise money for a proper car to reach out to the remote villages where the Self-Help-Groups work since most of the roads here are bare, unpaved and have enormous potholes. The Choma Municipal Council employs approx. 100 people and my first task is to understand the way the council works and to familiarize myself with the Zambian conditions of employment in the public service. The next step will be to set up job descriptions and improve the recruitment of staff members. A lot of work! I hope to finish my work here in Choma by the end of June. I will then move to Lusaka to counsel the National Women's Lobby and a farmers association. To be able to get to know so many different people in different organizations is very exciting!

Working methods are very different to those in Germany: things move much slower here and being on time isn't very common. So I've realized I need to be more patient here. However my partners are very interested in suggestions and improvements, and although we take very small steps I feel I can make a (little) difference. This is my first time in Africa and I have experienced a very warm welcome and have made a lot of new friends in a short period of time. Living conditions are very different to those in Europe and it's not always easy but thanks to the support of my VSO mates and local colleagues I have gotten used to them very quickly. Zambian culture is fascinating and I have a lot to learn! I can't believe it has only been one month since I came here! I have even received an African name – *Choolwe* – which means luck. And I feel I am more than lucky to be here!

All the best from Zambia,

Susann Stritzke
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