

Wendy Margolese, Randstad Canada, placed in Zambia from Nov 2010 – May 2011. Worked as HR advisor to Siavonga Nutrition Group (NGO).



My story is pretty simple. I always knew I wanted to volunteer and I have always been interested in learning about different cultures. It can be scary to make the decision to leave everything you know behind and leap into a new reality. Once I realized that Randstad would give me a chance to take this time away and give back in this way without losing my position, I realized I was crazy not to cease the opportunity.

The VSO process does take some patience, but in exchange they give you all the tools you'll need to be able to acclimatize yourself into your new culture as easily as possible. I didn't know what to expect once I arrived. I was thinking about my accommodation, my new role, the culture and the people. But one of the things I didn't consider was what would happen after I did my initial settling in... Who would I socialize with? Where would I do my shopping? I think this is where VSO shines: I have a fabulous roommate and there are other VSO volunteers and local volunteers to make that transition so much easier. My roommate took me to the market and walked me around town to show me where everything was located. She also introduced me to some of the business owners, and people with whom she already made connections. Other volunteers invited me to their homes for dinner and to show me around our little town.

I've been in Siavonga, Zambia for 2 months now, and I'm loving the opportunity to learn the local language of Tonga and get to know people. Not just to meet them but to get to know them, to see them regularly, to live among them and socialize with them. I love my job and my colleagues at SNG (Siavonga Nutrition Group) and I'm looking forward to see what they are going to accomplish in 2011 with the help of the VSO volunteers. We are currently working on many proposals for projects that will take place this year, to help reduce malnutrition in our local area and to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS prevention.

Prior to leaving Toronto I was focused on the work I would be doing here in Siavonga and how it could help the NGO I was working for, but I wasn't anticipating everything else I'm learning. How Africa really feels, looks and works by living here for an extended period of time. Siavonga is a small African town: I know my local baker, the ladies I buy my produce from, the local lodge owners... Everyone is very connected to each other, there are few secrets within my community! It's not just about the work I'm doing with my local NGO, but the work our organization is doing with other NGOs and making personal connections within the community. I feel forever changed by this experience and enriched in a way that's hard to describe. I think this experience has taught me that most rewards outweigh the risk. Volunteering with VSO is an amazing way to give back and to get back so much. I hope there will be more people from Randstad in 2011 who take the plunge. The reward far outweighs the risk!

All the best,

Wendy