

# Volunteers challenges for change



Three International  
Volunteers 2007

Three international volunteers (*start from left: Bethany Speer, Sabina Ferhatovic and Julie Kendall*) was successfully finished their placement in Žene Ženama. These our second year of remarkable work and experience with international volunteers.

Zene Zenama strongly believed that volunteers and local staff shared and transferred their skills with each other in order to understand their personal and professional development. A positive and realistic commitment; desire and strong commitment of learning of volunteers contributed to the success of their owned placement.

We will continue to challenge and work with the volunteers to make a difference in order to promote volunteerism. Our success will not be achieved without the contribution from our partners. (*International Disaster Psychology Department — University of Denver, USA; Challenges Worldwide UK; Project Bosnia: International Studies—University of Denver, USA; and Community of Bosnia volunteering program*)



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# Challenging placement after her career in military...Julie Kendall



*I believe I contributed to Zene Zenama effort to assist with the reconciliation process in the post-conflict area by creating a training manual that can be used in many different forums with a broad. range of participants.*

Julie

I believe I contributed to Žene Ženama effort to assist with the reconciliation process in the post-conflict area by creating a training manual that can be used in many different forums with a broad range of participants. We chose to write about four separate topics that will help people to better understand others and themselves, their needs and their desires, as well as helping them to take care of themselves. I believe that our training manual topics are appropriate for both laypeople and professionals in many fields. We selected vicarious traumatization since we believe that many people listen regularly to accounts of others' trauma, communication to assist with improving people's ability to both understand and to be understood, gender-based violence so help institute at the local community level what has been mandated at the international level, and finally, stress management as it is a common challenge for all human beings to take care of themselves.

With the assistance of a fellow Denver University intern, I helped create a nearly 50-page training manual on four separate topics that can be used as a template by successive interns for other topics of their choice. I also edited a grant proposal. We arrived with quite a clear mandate: to develop a training manual. It was left to us as the interns to select both the topics to be presented and the manual format, and also to propose the target audiences; it was also clearly articulated from the beginning that this was our unique and individual contribution that was not to be influenced by Žene Ženama staff. While challenging, this concept of working completely on our own turned out to be a great opportunity for the two of us to truly excel. Good idea.

I adapted well from the beginning and was fully supported by both the Volunteer Coordinator and the Žene Ženama employees. Everyone went all out to help us in our task. I only found it challenging to find an internet access site on a regular basis... once that was secured (at USAID), everything went quite well. I made some wonderful friends among the true professionals who both work and volunteer at Žene Ženama .

I also volunteered at another NGO who took care of my accommodations and pre-departure information. I must say, however, that it is quite well known that Žene Ženama exceeds every expectation in clearly delineating the interns' tasks and rates at the very top of all the Denver University internships. The majority of this is due to Žene Ženama volunteer supervisor's ability to carefully and accurately explain to the interns the process and goals for the summer and then to completely support the people. She is a master at providing enough information for us to succeed and operates with a completely "hand-off" supervisory model.

# Lesson learnt through out my placement ...Bethany Speer



*I had to learn to create my own boundaries and vision for the project without knowing if I was creating something that would be valued by the organization. Because of this, I tried simply to make a product that I would be proud of and that I felt was practical and useful.*

*Bethany*

I came to Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the Project Bosnia program at the University of Denver. This is an International Service Learning program which provides students with an integrated academic, service and travel experience. I worked specifically with Žene Ženama out of my desire to learn more about grassroots NGOs as well as the possibility of helping to improve the lives of women vicariously through the organization. While interning at Žene Ženama, I was given language instruction as well as insight into Bosnian culture. This was a very helpful introduction as I had received little of this type of instruction before arriving in Sarajevo. Also, this allowed me the opportunity to become more comfortable with the work environment and to get to know the employees of the organisations.

My main task was to create a Program Training Manual. I spent about 12 hours a week for 5 weeks on this project in conjunction with another volunteer from the University of Denver. The manual was written in English with the intent that it will be translated into Bosnia for use by local volunteers. It consists of a description of Žene Ženama, an Introduction, techniques for teaching diverse classes, techniques for leading class discussions, and four class modules. The four class modules covered such diverse topics as Communication, Tolerance and Conflict Resolution; Stress; Gender-Based Violence; and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The classes are intended to last 1 to 1 ½ hours. They include background information and outlines for the classes which involve lectures, class discussions and activities. The Program Training Manual was presented to Žene Ženama at monthly board meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2007.

The main difficulty in the production of the program training manual was the lack of in-house computers with internet access. Both myself the other volunteer needed to use the internet in order to do research for the Program Training Manual, however, Žene Ženama only has one computer with internet. Despite this setback, I learned not only about a different language and culture but also about adjusting to difficult circumstances. I admire greatly the work that Žene Ženama has done in the last 10 years and I hope that they may continue to help the women of Bosnia to empower themselves and the communities in which they live for many years to come.

I learned to create a product with very little specification from Žene Ženama. This was a challenge for me as in most of my other work experiences I have been given very specific assignments. Thus, I had to learn to create my own boundaries and vision for the project without knowing if I was creating something that would be valued by the organization. Because of this, I tried simply to make a product that I would be proud of and that I felt was practical and useful.

# Going back to my country

## Sabina Ferhatovic



*I realize the need and urgency that exists in alleviating and creating understanding between cultures in order for an individual and an organization to function effectively in a global standard.*

*Sabina*

I felt that my background and my being in the organization contributed in making a link between several staff and volunteers involved. Because I am a Bosnian living abroad, I have two identities and this duality allowed me to act as a liaison. For example, I was able to analyze and view the staff and other international volunteers with double lenses - those of the Bosnian lens and that of the “American/Western” lens. So to each side, the locals and the internationals, while I was able to relate to only them, I was also able to relate to the other side and explain it. From time to time, I assisted with translation of some words from English to Bosnian by understanding the English context and mentality and explaining it in the Bosnian terms. I also explained some cultural and mentality standards of Americans and westerners in general.

On the other hand, I helped out the two international volunteers by making sense out of some cultural aspects and assisting with the pronunciation and spelling of Bosnian. Once again, my Bosnian culture/language knowledge and my American culture/English language background allowed me to very clarify and teach. I chose this particular change because I feel like understanding of cultures and peoples is very important especially when it comes to networking between or within international organizations. While the people may be able to speak the same language, cultural aspects come greatly into play in the sense of how people understand each other. For example, mentality, body language, and expectations vary from cultures and are extremely important. Since I have knowledge of the Western side and the Bosnian side, I was able to familiarize each side with the other and in that way, further understanding.

I feel that this is important because Žene Ženama works with international organizations in general and will continue to do so, if not expand its circles of international partners, and in that way, it is important for the people involved to see the situation in the cultural context, and not only the language context.

While I was always a strong believer that cultural understanding is very important in intercultural interactions of any kind, especially those of business, this was even more emphasized by my interning with Žene Ženama. Furthermore, I realize the need and urgency that exists in alleviating and creating understanding between cultures in order for an individual and an organization to function effectively in a global standard. This experience has further contributed to my interest and decision to further my education in psychology with an emphasis on cultural differences and adaptations. My plan for the upcoming semester is applying for PhD programs in psychology and I will attempt to find one that deals with exactly these issues. I will use my experience with Žene Ženama as an example in my essays, as well as a topic of conversation in my graduate school interviews. I learned that very often, things do not go as planned, and one has to adapt to the situation at hand and “go with the flow”. This was the case with the English classes. Furthermore, I learned

*Julie....*

I have worked in the military and civilian worlds for over 25 years and I can honestly say that she is one of the best at creating a free-thinking environment where her volunteers will only succeed. I laud her talents and thank her sincerely.

We decided to work Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. At about the midpoint of our 8-week internship, we began to do research work at USAID's site where we had free and open access to the internet. This was critical as there is only one computer at Žene Ženama with internet access and it is in constant use. I also had brought my laptop which allowed us to work together on weekends and at the Žene Ženama office. We then returned to Žene Ženama for the final compilation of our project the last week and presented it to the Board of Directors. It had previously been proposed that we meet with each Education Coordinator but we never really needed to do so and I believe it actually would not have really benefited us in our work. Both of us also had another internship at local NGOs so we had the freedom from Žene Ženama to work at two places unencumbered.

**A truly great experience!**

*Continue from page 3...Bethany*

By volunteering with Žene Ženama, I learned about the atmosphere and processes of a small NGO. Personally, it was rewarding to see so many people devoting so much time and energy to the improvement of the lives of others.

As for Žene Ženama, it is my opinion that the organization may benefit more greatly if it can provide specific assignments for interns and volunteers. I think that this would increase the likelihood that the organization receives an end product that it desires and can use.



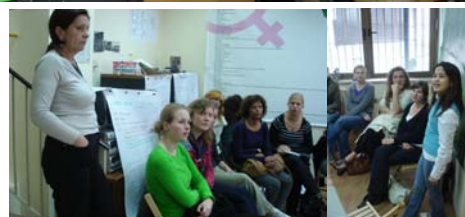
Other volunteers involved at Žene Ženama

*Continue from page 4... Sabina*

more about the functioning of the NGOs in the Bosnian post-war context and the challenges and issues they face, as well as their successes thus far.

I have adapted personally into the work environment that is found at Žene Ženama. It was a great experience seeing how the co-workers interact and function around one another. Overall, I was very quickly accepted by them and have been able to get to know them on a professional and personal basis—this has been one of the highlights of my placement at Žene Ženama. I have adapted by functioning accordingly, so sitting down with everyone when everyone is doing so, as well as working and staying out of the way when something needs to be done. It has been a bit difficult trying to put the pieces together of all the projects that are being worked on, all the people that came by, and all the phone calls that were received and made. I tried to learn about the projects going on by asking questions and reading the Annual Report. The projects I did read about, such as the Women Can Do It, and others, I was very impressed and glad that such existed since Bosnian women do need to be empowered. Also, the fact that Žene Ženama is working on implementing the UNSCR Resolution 1325 is very impressive.

I learned about some issues that Bosnian women, and Bosnian populations, in general are facing. I also learned about what is being done to attempt to alleviate these problems. My viewpoint is broader and my global perspective on these issues has expanded. Through this internship, I gained international experience that had personal meaning since I was conducting it in my homeland. I interacted with the ladies of Žene Ženama and bonded with them on professional and personal levels. It has been a wonderful.



Study visit by eighteen young social work students from Sweden. Dialogue and exchange information focused on challenges, problems and work of NGOs in BiH addressing women issues.

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