

## For VHC Volunteer Andrea Mayer, Working in South Africa Was More than Just a “Feel Good” Project

From the moment Andrea Mayer arrived in South Africa, she had an agenda.

“I wanted to make sure that when I completed my assignments in South Africa both organizations I worked with were in different situation than they were before I joined them. I did not want this to be just a ‘feel good’ project,” she explains.

A monitoring and evaluation expert with a Master’s Degree in Public Administration and more than five years of experience designing and implementing projects, Mayer put her social science background to good use assisting both the Aids Consortium in Johannesburg and The Networking HIV/AIDS Community of South Africa (NACOSA) in Cape Town during a year-long volunteer assignment that concluded in July.



Andrea Mayer conducts a monitoring and evaluation workshop at the AIDS Consortium “Bua,” a regular gathering of the organization’s NGO members.

She was placed by the Twinning Center’s Volunteer Healthcare Corps (VHC) thanks to PEPFAR funding and the support of CDC/South Africa.

“At both organizations, we developed, conducted, analyzed, and reported on a survey of affiliates. This was a major success not only because we were able to roll it out quickly, but also gain valuable information about our constituents,” Andrea explains.

“The surveys identified areas that needed more attention and enabled us to effectively show affiliates the value of monitoring and evaluation,” she says. “They also showed these organizations that they are capable of conducting an annual survey.”

Despite the fact that these two organizations are a thousand kilometers away from each other, Andrea was able to accomplish a lot in just under a year’s time.

At the AIDS Consortium, she worked with staff to develop and conduct a pilot project that asked a small group of affiliates to report data, participate in its

analysis, and its use for decision making. At NACOSA, she helped develop a monitoring and evaluation plan, framework, and protocol as part of the Global Fund Round 9 grant program.

“Andrea has made a positive contribution to the AIDS Consortium and its affiliates,” acknowledges Denis Anthony, the organization’s Monitoring and Evaluation Manager. “Our M&E Department is up and running thanks to her, which had a positive impact on a recent Oxfam-America evaluation,” he explains, noting that most staff and affiliates now produce qualitative reports for their partners and donors.

According to NACOSA Executive Director Dr. Maureen van Wyk, Andrea’s efforts “Helped us get a positive review from the Global Fund Local Fund Agent (LFA).”

Andrea sums up her VHC experience, saying, “I feel there are two critical factors that make some volunteer opportunities more positive than others. First, is the right level of support from the placement agency; second, it is the quality of the placement organization. I was lucky in both regards. I was fortunate to be placed in big cities and was able to avail myself of the existing opportunities and networks. Also, both organizations where I was placed had experience with international volunteers. They had a clear understanding of my role within the organization and were ready for capacity building.”

Although Andrea insists that she has done nothing special, the people she worked with all agree that she provides a perfect example of how one dedicated individual can make a real difference.

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*— Denis Anthony, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, The AIDS Consortium, Johannesburg, South Africa.*