

Leslie Riekenberg • WomenCraft Social Enterprises • Report

About WomenCraft Social Enterprises:

WomenCraft was founded in the wake of social and political unrest in the tri-border region of Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. With the help of the UNHCR, WomenCraft brought the women of the region together by providing income generating opportunities and social support through supplemental programs and trainings. An artisan employed by WomenCraft has the opportunity to increase her financial ability to provide for her family, work and learn within a community of like-minded women, as well as the chance to develop her personal and professional skills. Through holistic support and supplemental programs, WomenCraft provides an outlet for local women to increase their potential as leaders, learn the fundamental aspects of entrepreneurship, and to receive basic literacy and English education.

My Role at WomenCraft Social Enterprises:

Training and Development

As an organization built for and sustained by local Tanzanians, one of WomenCraft's priorities is to have the organization run solely by local staff and the artisans they support. In order to help make that goal a reality, my role is to work with the local staff and key artisan leaders to increase their capacity to run and manage the organization. Since each staff member has their own individual education needs, part of my job is determining their needs and helping to develop a training plan that will allow them to achieve their learning objectives. I am working to develop and identify training programs that are tailored to the staffs' individual needs as well as their needs as a group. For the past three months the trainings I have been implementing have primarily focused on English, Computer, and Leadership skills.

Route Week and Artisan Group Visits

The first week of every month is spent traveling to the villages where WomenCraft's artisans live and work. Each day we travel to a different region in the tri-border area. In a matter of four days we drive along the border divides of the three countries, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi, a different country nearly each day. At one point during my first route week my coworker explained to me that we were driving on the border-divide between Tanzania and Burundi and that half of the car was in Tanzania and the other half in Burundi. My coworker then jokingly asked to see my passport since I was sitting on the side of the car that was technically in Burundi.

Aside from getting to travel around the countryside, the primary goal of route week is to collect products that the artisans have been working on, assess the quality of their products, pay for previous orders, handout materials for future orders and to provide a short informative training. Within the next month WomenCraft hopes to implement a literacy program for some of their artisan groups. In order to determine what groups need

the literacy program and the interest of the artisans, I have been spending route weeks focusing on conducting a needs assessment with the groups to determine what groups are best suited for implementing the literacy pilot program.

Leader's Meeting

Every artisan group that WomenCraft works with nominates three leaders to represent their group: a president, a best weaver and a secretary. Twice a year we invite all of the leaders from the twenty-five groups WomenCraft employs to a group meeting. I helped organize the most recent meeting, which took place in June. The Leader's Meeting is an excellent place for the women to exchange ideas, best practices, and for WomenCraft to share information. This past Leader's Meeting we focused on providing the leaders with trainings in the areas of production and quality control, conflict management, and leadership. WomenCraft hopes that by providing a select few women from each group with trainings and information, they will be able to share the knowledge and skills they have gained from the trainings with the artisan group they represent.

Looking Forward

Over the next three months I have many projects that I hope to accomplish with WomenCraft. The two I am most excited about are launching the new literacy program and working with the WomenCraft Artisan Advisory Committee (AAC). The Artisan Advisory Committee is a group of five women who are elected by the groups on their route, each woman represents an average of three to ten groups. During the next few months I hope to begin implementing English and Leadership trainings with the AAC Members in order to better equip them to move up within the organization as well as to work with WomenCraft in the long term.