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Randstad volunteer Marjorie in India



Marjorie da Silva has been working as HR advisor in South Orissa, India, since February 2009. She's been working for a large local NGO: [People's Rural Education Movement \(PREM\)](#).

"After ten months' experience of working in an Indian NGO, I've really learnt a lot about myself and my professional skills. PREM works with the poorest and most marginalized communities through sustainable development initiatives. Their work includes scholarship support for tribal children so those can attend school as well as building awareness and capacity within communities on participating in self-governance. This helps them access and use their rights and entitlements. PREM also trains women to form Self Help Groups (SHGs), which provide entrepreneurial opportunities for rural people living below the poverty line.

Like many NGOs, PREM is focused on local, field level initiatives and has not previously centralized HR into its operational structure. Therefore I faced many challenges in implementing HR policies and procedures. My major initiative was in developing an HR policy to cover annual leave, attendance, and other rules and regulations for the office-based programme staff and for field staff. It was tough as employees and managers are so focused on the results of the programmes, they initially regarded HR as a constraint to their activities.

Added to the challenges of working abroad, in a new culture and in an NGO, I also had to work and live using the English language. I had done none of that before! The working culture is very different in India and can be frustrating – it's difficult to plan a meeting and there is a high level of absenteeism, which is considered "normal". Therefore patience and the ability to adapt are vital!

Life in rural India is different to back home and can sometimes be challenging, particularly as a woman. Going out after dark for example is not advisable, as a consequence my daily habits have changed: I wake up early and start the day with some yoga. Every few weeks I also meet up with other volunteers based in Orissa and we're able to support each other and share our experiences. I was also very lucky to share the flat with a great home-mate for the first six months.

I will never forget the kindness of Indians, the importance they give to family, their stress-free approach to life, their generosity and how proud they are to be Indian. I will also never forget the privilege of meeting the tribal schoolchildren. Despite coming from remote and poor communities where they cannot attend school due to economic hardship or lack of school facilities, they are outperforming their more affluent classmates academically when supported in education. I will keep in mind this simple way of living where "expect the unexpected" has become my motto and made the life more exciting."

Greetings from India,

Marjorie da Silva

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