Civic service means growing together

From the bustling streets of Delhi to the peaceful little town of Beaumont-de-Lomagne in Tarn-et-Garonne, Poornima admits that she has embarked on a whole new chapter in her life. ‘It turned out that this experience changed my life.’

We interviewed Poornima MAHAJAN to find out what matters most to her.



My name is Poornima. I am Indian. I am doing international civic service in the field of education and interculturality and work at LEAP LESTONNAC secondary school (Occitanie) as an English language assistant. I introduce students to Indian culture in order to encourage them to participate in international mobility and engage in international solidarity.

What was you motivation for starting this experience in France?

Having been engaged in volunteering for years and deeply believing in the importance of education, I came to France

with a simple yet powerful intention: to learn, to share, and to create a positive impact wherever I go.



The International Civic Service shared my passion and offered me the wonderful opportunity to work in the field of education and interculturality at LEAP Lestonnac, a French private agricultural school.

Which activities did you carry out during your civic service in France?



My role was to assist mainly in English classes, but also to participate in others, weaving cultural exchange into daily lessons. I introduced students to the beauty of Indian culture through Bollywood dance workshops, Indian cooking sessions, festival celebrations, and many small moments that acted as bridges between our worlds.

Which impressions of France and lessons learnt do you bring back home?

I still remember my first step out of the car in Beaumont, breathing in the crisp, fresh air and feeling instantly mesmerised by the endless greenery. Life here moved at a slower pace, and soon, so did I. The warm smiles of colleagues, the curiosity of students, and the gentle rhythm of the town became my daily companions.



Working with the students shaped me in ways I hadn't imagined. At first, the language gap made explanations challenging. But soon I learned to be creative using gestures, drawings, and role-play and other activities and realised that connection often comes before vocabulary. One afternoon, after achieving good scores in her exam, a student quietly came up to me and said, "Thank you for believing in me when I couldn't." That moment stayed in my heart. It reminded me that teaching is not just about lessons, but about unlocking courage and self-belief in others. These skills will stay with me for life, whether in a classroom or any other professional space.

France surprised me by quietly dismantling the stereotypes the world has created. People were open, kind, and often went out of their way to make me feel at home. Even in a small town, I found richness in conversations, traditions, and shared meals.

What did you find quite challenging during your stay?

Of course, there were challenges. As a vegetarian, finding my kind of food and explaining egg and fish not being vegetarian food for Indians was sometimes tricky. I missed the comfort of homecooked Indian meals, the burst of spices, the warmth of family. Adapting to the French palate took time, but it also taught me to appreciate subtle flavours and to find joy in simplicity, and just like that cheese and baguette became my favourite part if every meal.

What would you say to sum up your experience?

As a summury of this unique experience, I would say this: volunteering abroad is not just about giving, it's about growing together. It's about stepping into the unknown and discovering that the world has far more kindness than we often believe. "World os a beautiful place, if seen with right lenses." It's about realising that you can carry your culture with pride while embracing another with an open heart.



To anyone considering such an experience, whether as a student, teacher, or professional,

I can only say: take the leap.

The skills you gain, the friendships you form, and the perspectives you bring home will stay with you forever. Beaumont-de-Lomagne will always be my reminder that when cultures meet, the world becomes a little smaller and a lot warmer.

Featured image : Launch of the Franco-Indian 'civic services' alumni network at the French Embassy in New Delhi on 7 July 2025, in the presence of Thierry Mathou, the Ambassador, Yann Delaunay and the General Management of France Volontaires.

For more information, visit Poornima's blog on Moveagri

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