MEMBER PROFILE

Yakuta Bhagat

Senior Environmental Scientist, EnviroScience Inc.



I work at an environmental consulting firm near Akron, Ohio, in the capacity of a senior scientist and project manager. My work typically involves conducting water quality and habitat assessments, biological community evaluations, and ecological risk assessments for natural resource sites as part of routine monitoring studies, and for industrial facilities as part of compliance evaluations for environmental permitting.

My Pandemic Story

At the onset of the pandemic, it was very difficult managing my project workload at home while also taking care of my two preschool-age children. As was the case with most families, my husband and I were thrust into a situation that was completely unfamiliar and were forced to quickly adapt to our very unusual circumstances. My project work at the time involved conducting analyses and writing reports. Homeschooling my kids during the day and working at odd hours of the night proved unsustainable after a few short weeks, at which point it became necessary to significantly reduce my work hours and take a pay cut as a result. The passing of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act in April helped in providing resources such as partial paid family leave to facilitate managing work while schools were shut down. In some respects, I am quite fortunate to be able to work remotely and have a flexible schedule so, while there have indeed been some challenges, I have been able to adapt to a new normal and take solace in the fact that my family members and I have managed to remain healthy and safe during this rather precarious time.

As we approach the start of the school year and with the continuing rise in the number of cases, the possibility of a second wave of the pandemic and an inevitable second shutdown is something that has been on my mind lately.

During the shutdown and even now, my family and I rely heavily on social networking platforms such as FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom to stay connected to extended family members, friends, and teachers. This has helped tremendously in coping with the situation with which we are faced and bringing a sense of togetherness and solidarity.

An unexpected silver lining in the midst of this very challenging and uncertain time has been the ability to slow down the pace and spend quality time at home with my family, engaging in fun and creative activities on a daily basis that our normal schedules may not have allowed.

A look to the future

We are fortunate to live in a time where technology has proven to be a saving grace. The virtual conference held by IAGLR in June demonstrated how the scientific community can still convene to share ideas and have important discussions on ongoing research and topics of social importance. This pandemic has taught us all lessons in humility, sustainability, and our inherent need to stay connected. It is important for the research community to continue fostering communication and finding new and innovative ways of conducting research independently and collaboratively.